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THE MATING AND NESTING HABITS OF FREGATA AQUILA.

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7 Among the many interesting birds to be found on Laysan Island, perhaps, one of the first to attract the attention of the visitor is the man-o'-war, *Fregata aquila* (Linn.). Floating gracefully a few feet over head it follows a new comer about with curious interest. One cannot fail to be impressed with the beauty and grace of these creatures. The male is especially distinctive with its jet-black body, iridescent scapulars, long forked tail that opens and closes at intervals like a pair of shears, and its unique gula-pouch, that, during the mating season, is inflated into a large sack-like affair, bright red in color, and for all the world like a toy balloon.

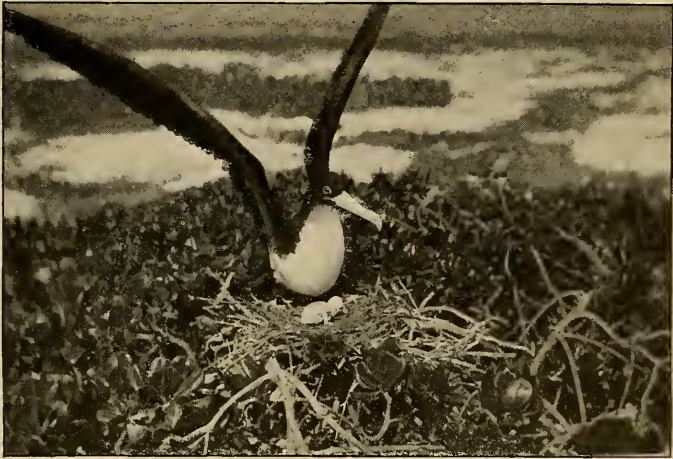
Naturalists have speculated long as to the use of this gula-pouch of the man-o'-war bird. During a several weeks' residence on Laysan, which fortunately fell at the season when the mating and nesting of these birds was at its height, a careful scrutiny of their habits convinced me, at least, that while it served primarily for the attraction of a mate, the gula-pouch may be used also as an aggressive feature with which to frighten an enemy.

Man-o'-war birds were found nesting in large colonies, many acres in extent, building their nests on the tops of low bushes. In some places their nests were so close together

that the occupant of one was often disturbed by the flopping wings of its neighbor. The male takes an active part in the nest building and in some instances builds a nest even before finding a mate. In such cases, after his work is finished he sits quietly holding down his claim. If by chance he is frightened from his post, thieving neighbors of the same species will carry away the nest stick by stick.

In the same buoyancy of spirit in which the pea-cock spreads its resplendent tail and the argus pheasant its gorgeous wings, this bird inflates the gula-sack to a size so large that it often conceals from the front the bird's entire body, save only the beak and eyes. Evidently Nature intended this embellishment to take the place of a song as the creature has only a hoarse cackle, far from winsome, which, nevertheless, is kept up incessantly while mating. When a female comes near the nest, the male becomes very much excited, bending back its head, swaying its pouch from side to side, partially spreading its wings and tail, and flopping about in the most ridiculous manner. At times it will rub its pouch against the female, who, true to the instincts of her sex, pretends not to be interested, unless by chance a rival appears, whereupon my lady not only takes an interest but proceeds to drive away the intruder. After the single egg is laid the male does not inflate the gula-sack, excepting on rare occasions.

The birds seem not to mind the presence of man in their rookeries, and will not leave their nests unless the intruder gets very near. One large male refused to leave the egg he was guarding until touched with a stick, whereupon, with gula-sack inflated and open mouth he came directly at the offender. His aspect was not unlike that of an angry sitting-hen, although much more formidable. This demonstration was so unexpected that it was impossible to make a photograph, but most fortunately the year following this incident, Mr. Alfred Bailey, who visited Laysan with a party sent out by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, in making a snapshot of the man-o'-war rookery, caught one of the birds in the same act without being aware of it until the plate was



Female Man-o'-War and Young a Few Hours Old.



A band of thieving pirates watching for an opportunity to rob other sea birds of their prey.



While primarily for the attraction of a mate the gular-sac of the male man-o'-war may be used as an aggressive feature. Note the bird in the upper left-hand corner.



Young Man-o'-War About Ten Days Old.